

British Drone and Air Strikes in 2015 against Iraq, Syria

A Look At the Data

By [Chris Cole](#)

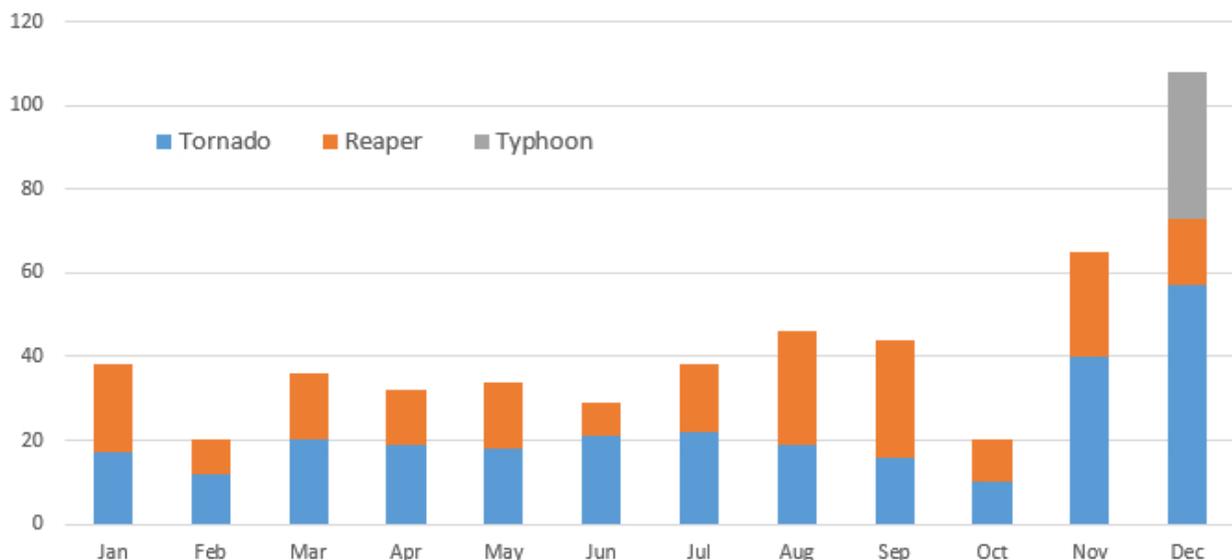
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Analysing [updates published by the Ministry of Defence](#) (MoD) of RAF operations in Iraq and Syria give something of an insight into the use of drones and aircraft for strikes by British forces in 2015. The updates do not give a complete picture as some strikes are omitted (for example the [targeted killing of Reyaad Khan](#)) and the number of strikes recorded in the reports do not match [officially published figures](#). Nevertheless they do give a broad indication of British air operations against ISIS. (Note the MoD's definition of a 'strike' and how it calculates the number of a strikes it has launched is extremely convoluted and has changed during the year - see this [explanation from the MoD](#).)

Strikes in Iraq

British drone and air strikes in Iraq 2015



	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec	Total
Tornado	17	12	20	19	18	21	22	19	16	10	40	57	271
Reaper	21	8	16	13	16	8	16	27	28	10	25	16	204
Typhoon												35	35
Total	38	20	36	32	34	29	38	46	44	20	65	108	510

*Note figures are from our analysis of MoD updates on operations against ISIS

According to the updates there was a steep rise in British air strikes in Iraq from early November which continued following the [Parliamentary vote authorising strikes in Syria](#) at the beginning of December. In fact according to our analysis of the figures, one-third of all UK air strikes against ISIS in 2015 took place in Iraq in the final two months of the year.

Strikes in Syria

British drone and air strikes in Syria 2015*



	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec
Tornado												8
Reaper												1
Typhoon												8
Total												17

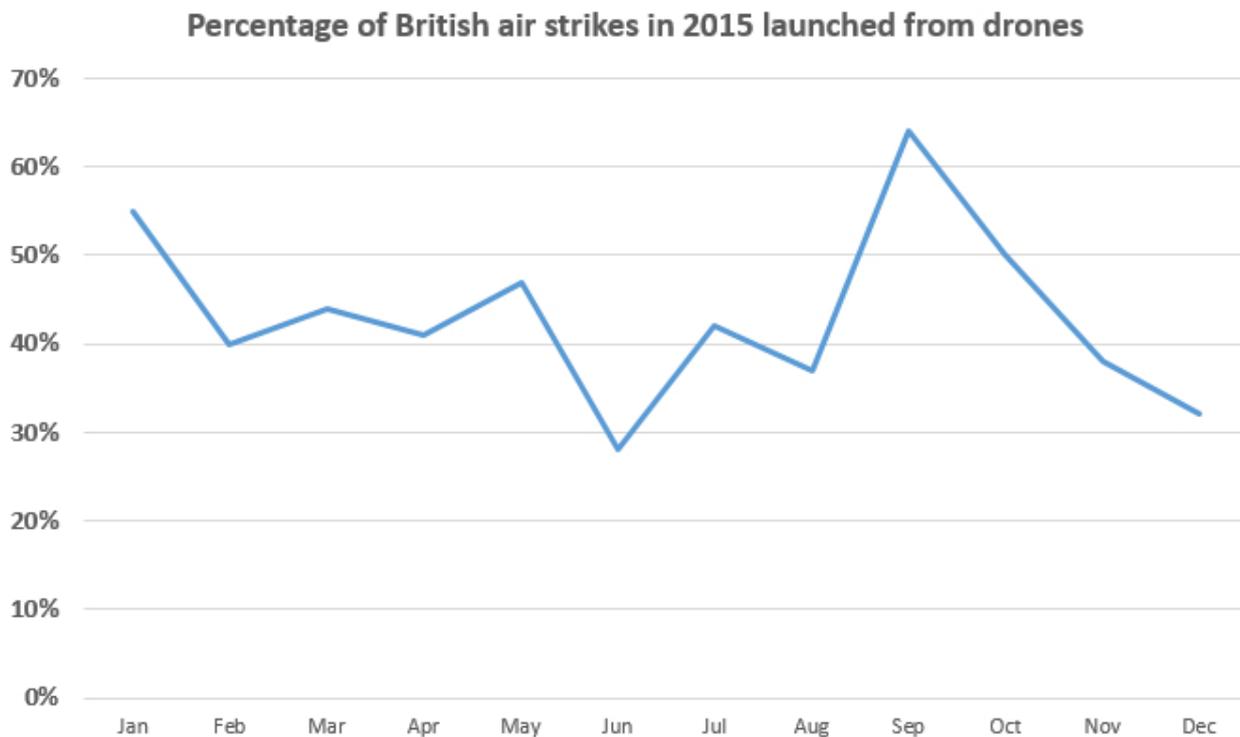
**Note figures are from our analysis of MoD updates on operations against ISIS - they do not include the well publicised drone strike against Reyaad Khan in August 2015.*

As some have noted, [the actual number of British strikes in Syria since the vote is very small](#) - three separate engagements of Tornados/Typhoons launching 16 strikes and one Reaper drone strike on Christmas Day. The steep rise in British strikes in Iraq compared with the small number of strikes in Syria is in stark contrast to the arguments put forward by the Prime Minister that Britain had [a military and moral duty](#) to launch strikes in Syria. While the small number of strikes in Syria may only be temporary due to the focus on [retaking Ramadi](#), it may indicate as commentators and [officials have reported](#), the lack of targets in Syria.

Reapers vs Tornados

While the MoD regularly argues that the primary role of Reaper drones is surveillance, British drones have been carrying out almost as many air strikes as the UK's dedicated strike aircraft. According to our analysis of the MoD updates, over 2015 as a whole, British Reaper drones have carried out 40% of UK air strikes against ISIS (with monthly figures fluctuating between 28% and 64%). It may be that with the [deployment of addition British](#)

[military aircraft](#) to the Middle East that the Reaper drones will be used less to undertake strikes and more for surveillance. We shall watch the figures carefully over the coming months.



The table below details the targets of UK strikes in 2015 according to the MoD updates. While Tornados and Typhoons have undertaken the majority of strikes and therefore hit the majority of targets in the various categories, drones have been used more to target vehicles, checkpoints, IED emplacers/vehicles and storage compounds.

British drone and air strikes in Iraq and Syria 2015*

Target as described by MoD	Reaper Drone	Tornado or Typhoon	Total
ISIL position/building	38	59	97
Vehicle	41	13	54
Mortar or machine gun position	10	82	92
Attacking group or terrorist group	40	55	95
Armed pick-up truck	6	8	14
Armoured Personnel Carrier (APC)	9	13	22
Engineering vehicles	10	12	22
ISIL complex or bunker or logistics hub	1	18	19
Heavy weapons (e.g. artillery or anti-aircraft gun)	5	14	19
Storage compound or weapons cache	11	9	20
ISIL Checkpoint	10	2	12
Individuals laying IEDs/IEDs	6	1	7
Vehicle-borne IED	13	3	16
IED factory	1	1	2
Sniper	2	11	13
Barricades or defences	1	3	4
Boat	1	0	1
Oilfield infrastructure	0	16	16
Not given	0	2	2
Total	205	322	527

* Data from UK MoD's 'Update: air strikes in Iraq and Syria' web page

Civilian Casualties

The UK continues to insist that there is [no evidence that any civilians have been killed](#) in the hundreds of air strikes it has undertaken in Iraq and Syria. However civilian casualties from Coalition air strikes continue to be reported.

UK confirms its aircraft carried out strikes this week at Ramadi & Mosul, on days when civilians alleged killed <https://t.co/t3g5H8UxWz>

— Airwars (@airwars_) [December 24, 2015](#)

[Airwars](#), which monitors Coalition air strikes in Iraq and Syria, regularly reports on civilian casualties from Coalition air strikes and reported just before Christmas that British strikes had been carried out on days and in locations when civilian casualties occurred. However in response the Ministry of Defence told the media that [it would not be investigating reports of civilians casualties](#) unless they came directly from UK military personnel, or 'local forces' deemed friendly. Such a position is not only absurd but immoral. Reports of civilian casualties from UK air and drone strikes from reliable sources must be taken seriously and investigated. Otherwise the UK's insistence that no civilians have been killed or injured in the hundreds of air and drone strikes it has carried out is not just incredible, but simply no longer believable.

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